

Joseph Smith Tells His Own Story

Reprinted from the Church's periodical Times and Seasons (volumes 3 and 4) published by Joseph Smith and others at Nauvoo, Illinois, 1839- 1846. This edition: Copyright 1985 by Price Publishing Company 915 East 23rd St S, Independence, MO 64055 (Phone 1-816-461-5659)

I was born in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five, on the twenty-third day of December, in the town of Sharon, Windsor County, state of Vermont. My father, Joseph Smith, senior, left the state of Vermont, and moved to Palmyra, Ontario (now Wayne) County, in the state of New York, when I was in my tenth year. In about four years after my father's arrival at Palmyra, he moved with his family into Manchester, in the same county of Ontario. His family, consisting of eleven souls, namely: My father, Joseph Smith, my mother, Lucy Smith, (whose name, previous to her marriage was Mack, daughter of Solomon Mack,) my brothers, Alvin, (who is now dead,) Hyrum, myself, Samuel Harrison, William, Don Carlos, and my sisters, Sophronia, Catherine, and Lucy. Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country; indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, "lo, here," and some "lo, there;" some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptists. For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts for these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal



manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased. Yet, when the converts began to file off, some to one party, and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real, for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued; priest contending against priest, and convert against convert, so that all the good feelings, one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words, and a contest about opinions. I was at this time in my fifteenth year. My father's family was proselyted' to the Presbyterian faith, and four of them joined that church, namely, my mother Lucy, my brothers Hyrum, Samuel Harrison, and my sister Sophronia. During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often pungent, still I kept myself aloof from all those parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. But in process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them, but so great was the confusion and strife among the different denominations that it was impossible for a person, young as I was and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. My mind at different times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult was so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists, and Methodists, and used all their powers of either reason or sophistry to prove their errors, or at least to make the people think they were in error: on the other hand the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous to establish their own tenets, and disprove all others. In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself, What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right? Or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right which is it, and how shall I know it? While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask

of God, that giveth unto all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Never did any passage of Scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God I did, for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passage so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible. At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to "ask of God," concluding that if He gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture. So in accordance with this my determination, to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt.

The Vision in the Grove

It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally. After I had retired into the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such astounding influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction, not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world who had such a marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being. Just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the

brightness of the sun; which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description) standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said, (pointing to the other,) "This is My beloved Son, hear Him. "

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right? that I might know which to join. No sooner therefore did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personage who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right, (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong,) and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in His sight; that those professors were all corrupt, "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrine the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." He again forbade me to join with any of them: and many other things did He say unto me which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself again I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement, and conversing with him on the subject of religion I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior, he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there was no such thing as visions or revelations in these days: that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there never would be any more of them. I soon found however that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion and was the cause of great persecution which continued to increase, and though I was an obscure boy only between fourteen and fifteen years of age and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world; yet men of high standing would take

notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a hot persecution, and this was common among all the sects: all united to persecute me. It has often caused me serious reflection both then and since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, so as to create in them a spirit of the hottest persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and was often cause of great sorrow to myself. However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had had a vision. I have thought since that I felt much like Paul when he made his defense before King Agrippa and related the account of the vision he had when he "saw a light and heard a voice," but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed, and reviled; but all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise, and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew and would know unto his latest breath that he had both seen a light, and heard a voice speaking to him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. So it was with me; I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak unto me, or one of them did; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision yet it was true, and while they were persecuting me, reviling me and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart, Why persecute for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision, and "who am I that I can withstand God," or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen, for I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dare I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God and come under condemnation. I had now got my mind satisfied so far as the sectarian world was concerned, that it was not my duty to join with any of them, but continue as I was until further directed; I had found the testimony of James to be true, that a man who lacked wisdom

might ask of God, and obtain and not be upbraided. I continued to pursue my common avocations in life until the twenty first of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty three, all the time suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision.

The Angel Moroni Appears to Joseph

During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision, and the year eighteen hundred and twenty three, having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends, and to have treated me kindly and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me, I was left to all kinds of temptations, and mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors and displayed the weakness of youth and the corruption of human nature, which I am sorry to say led me into divers temptations, to the gratification of many appetites offensive in the sight of God. In consequence of these things I often felt condemned for my weakness, and imperfections; when on the evening of the above mentioned twenty first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him: for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I had previously had one. While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in the room which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside standing in the air for his feet did not touch the floor.



He had on a loose robe of the most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I have ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant; his hands were naked and his arms also a little above the

wrist. So also were his feet naked, as were his legs a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him I was afraid, but the fear soon left me. He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni. That God had a work for me to do, and that my name should be had for good and evil, among all nations, kindreds, and tongues; or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. He said there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants. Also that there were two stones in silver bows, and these stones fastened to a breastplate constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim, deposited with the plates, and the possession and use of these stones was what constituted seers in ancient or former times, and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book. After telling me these things he commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament, he first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi; and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy

though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles. Instead of quoting the first verse as it reads in our books he quoted it thus, "For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble, for they that cometh shall burn them saith the Lord. of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. "And again he quoted the fifth verse thus, "Behold I will reveal unto you the priesthood by the hand of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. " He also quoted the next verse differently, "And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts Of the children shall turn to their fathers; if it were not so the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming." In addition to these he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah saying that it was about to be fulfilled. He quoted also the third chapter of Acts, twenty-second and twenty-third verses precisely as they stand in our New Testament. He said that the prophet was Christ, but the day had not yet come when they who would not hear His voice should be cut off from among the people, but soon would come. He also quoted the second chapter of Joel from the twenty-eighth to the last verse. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled but was soon to be. And he further stated the fullness of the Gentiles was soon to come in. He quoted many other passages of Scripture and offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here. Again he told me that when I got those plates of which he had spoken (for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled) I should not show them to any person, neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim, only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them, if I did I should be destroyed.

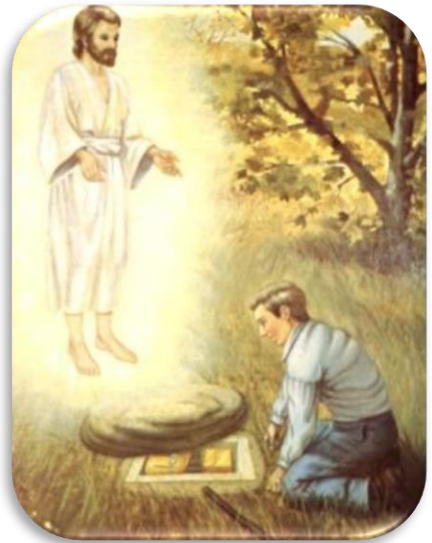
While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it. After this communication I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so until the room was again left dark except just around him, when instantly I saw as it were a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended up till he entirely disappeared and the room was left as it had been before

this heavenly light had made its appearance. I lay musing on the singularity of the scene and marveling greatly at what had been told me by this extraordinary messenger, when in the midst of my meditation I suddenly discovered that my room was again beginning to get lighted, and in an instant, as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside. He commenced and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit without the least variation, which having done, he informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence, and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation. Having related these things he again ascended as he had done before. By this time so deep were the impressions made on my mind that sleep had fled from my eyes and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard; but what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before and added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family) to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive but that of building His Kingdom, otherwise I could not get them. After this third visit he again ascended up into heaven as before and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced, when almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me the third time, the cock crew, and I found that day was approaching so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night. I shortly after arose from my bed, and as usual went to the necessary labors of the day, but in attempting to labor as at other times, I found my strength so exhausted as rendered me entirely unable. My father who was laboring along with me discovered something to be wrong with me and told me to go home. I started with the intention of going to the house, but in attempting to cross the fence out of the field where we were, my strength entirely failed me and I fell helpless on the ground and for a time was quite unconscious of anything.

The first thing that I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me calling me by name. I looked up and beheld the same messenger standing over my head surrounded by light as before. He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received. I obeyed, I returned back to my father in the field and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He replied to me, that it was of God, and to go and do as commanded by the messenger. I left the field and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited; and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there.

Finding the Plates at Hill Cumorah

Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario County, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood; on the west side of this hill not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates deposited in a stone box: this stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth.



Having removed the earth and obtained a lever which I got fixed under the edge of the stone and with a little exertion raised it up, I looked in and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim and the Breastplate as stated by the messenger. The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement; in the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things

with them. I made an attempt to take them out but was forbidden by the messenger and was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would be until four years from that time, but he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates. Accordingly as I had been commanded I went at the end of each year, and at each time I found the same messenger there and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews respecting what the Lord was going to do and how and in what manner His Kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.

The Four Intervening Years

As my father's worldly circumstances were very limited, we were under the necessity of laboring with our hands, hiring by day's work and otherwise as we could get opportunity, sometimes we were at home and sometimes abroad and by continued labor were enabled to get a comfortable maintenance. In the year eighteen hundred and twenty-four my father's family met with a great affliction by the death of my eldest brother Alvin. In the month of October, eighteen hundred and twenty-five, I hired with an old gentleman, by the name of Josiah Staal, who lived in Chenango County, State of New York. He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony, Susquehannah County, State of Pennsylvania, and had previous to my hiring with him been digging in order, if possible, to discover the mine. After I went to live with him he took me among the rest of his hands to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it. Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money digger.

During the time that I was thus employed I was put to board with a Mr. Isaac Hale of that place; it was there that I first saw my wife (his daughter) Emma Hale. On the eighteenth of January eighteen hundred and twenty-seven we were married while yet I was employed in the service of Mr. Staal. Owing to my still continuing

to assert that I had seen a vision persecution still followed me, and my wife's father's family were very much opposed to our being married. I was therefore under the necessity of taking her elsewhere so we went and were married at the house of Squire Tarbill, in South Bainbridge, Chenango County, New York. Immediately after my marriage I left Mr. Stoal's and went to my father's and farmed with him that season.

The Plates Obtained and The Persecution Begins

At length the time arrived for obtaining the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the Breastplate; on the twenty-second day of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, having gone as usual at the end of another year to the place where they were deposited, the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me, with this charge that I should be responsible for them: that if I should let them go carelessly or through any neglect of mine I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he the messenger should call for them, they should be protected. I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe, and why it was that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required of my hand, he would call for them; for no sooner was it known that I had them than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me; every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose; the persecution became more bitter and severe than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible; but by the wisdom of God they remained safe in my hands until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand, when according to arrangements the messenger called for them, I delivered them up to him and he has them in his charge until this day, being the second day of May, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight. The excitement, however, still continued, and rumor with her thousand tongues was all the time employed in circulating tales about my father's family, and about myself. If I were to relate a thousandth part of them it would fill up volumes. The persecution, however, became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of leaving Manchester, and going with my wife to Susquehannah

County in the State of Pennsylvania: while preparing to start (being very poor and the persecution so heavy upon us that there was no probability that we would ever be otherwise,) in the midst of our afflictions we found a friend in a gentleman by the name of Martin Harris, who came to us and gave me fifty dollars to assist us in our afflictions. Mr. Harris was a resident of Palmyra Township, Wayne County, in the State of New York, and a farmer of respectability. By this timely aid was I enabled to reach the place of my destination in Pennsylvania, and immediately after my arrival there I commenced copying the characters of the plates. I copied a considerable number of them, and by means of the Urim and Thummim I translated some of them, which I did between the time I arrived at the house of my wife's father in the month of December, and the February following.

Martin Harris Takes the Characters to Professor Anthon

Sometime in this month of February the aforementioned Mr. Martin Harris came to our place, got the characters which I had drawn off the plates and started with them to the city of New York. For what took place relative to him and the characters, I refer to his own account of the circumstances as he related them to me after his return which was as follows: "I went to the city of New York and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof to Professor Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the [reformed] Egyptian. "I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic, and he said that they were the true characters. He gave me a certificate certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. "I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. "He then said to me, 'Let me see that certificate.' I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was

no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him, he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, 'I cannot read a sealed book.' I left him and went to Dr. Mitchill, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting both the characters and translation."

The 116 Pages Are Lost

Mr. Harris having returned from this tour he left me and went home to Palmyra, arranged his affairs and returned again to my house about the twelfth of April, eighteen hundred and twenty eight, and commenced writing for me, while I translated from the plates, which we continued until the fourteenth of June following, by which time he had written one hundred and sixteen pages of manuscript on foolscap paper. Sometime after Mr. Harris had begun to write for me he began to tease me to give him liberty to carry the writings home and shew them, and desired of me that I would enquire of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim if he might not do so. I did enquire, and the answer was that he must not. However he was not satisfied with this answer, and desired that I should enquire again. I did so, and the answer was as before. Still he could not be contented, but insisted that I should enquire once more. After much solicitation I again enquired of the Lord, and permission was granted him to have the writings on certain conditions, which were, that he show them only to his brother Preserved Harris, his own wife, his father, and his mother, and a Mrs. Cobb, a sister to his wife. In accordance with this last answer I required of him that he should bind himself in a covenant to me in the most solemn manner, that he would not do otherwise than had been directed. He did so. He bound himself as I required of him, took the writings and went his way.

Notwithstanding however the great restrictions which he had been laid under, and the solemnity of the covenant which he had made with me, he did shew them to others, and by stratagem they got them away from him, and they never have been recovered nor obtained back again unto this day. In the meantime while Martin Harris was gone with the writings, I went to visit my father's family, at Manchester. I continued there for a short season and then returned to

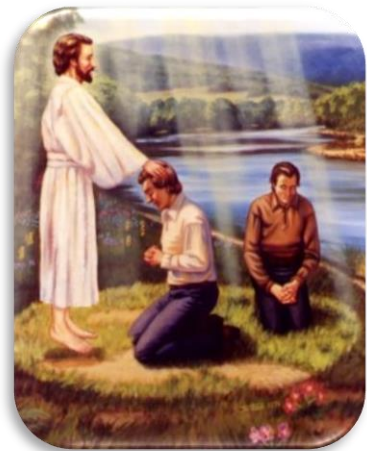
my place in Pennsylvania. Immediately after my return home I was walking out a little distance when behold the former heavenly messenger appeared and handed to me the Urim and Thummim again, (for it had been taken from me in consequence of my having wearied the Lord in asking for the privilege of letting Martin Harris take the writings which he lost by transgression,) and I enquired of the Lord through them and obtained the following revelation ... (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 2). After I had obtained the above revelation, both the plates and the Urim and Thummim were taken from me again; but in a few days they were returned to me, when I enquired of the Lord, and the Lord said thus unto me.... "Now behold I say unto you, that because you delivered up those writings which you had power given unto you to translate, by the means of the Urim and Thummim, into the hands of a wicked man, you have lost them: and you also lost your gift at the same time, and your mind became darkened; nevertheless, it is now restored unto you again, therefore see that you are faithful and continue on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work of translation as you have begun "Behold, wicked men have taken them from you; therefore, you have delivered them up; yea, that which was sacred unto wickedness. And, behold, Satan has put it into their hearts to alter the words which you have caused to be written, or which you have translated, which have gone out of your hands; and, behold, I say unto you, that because they have altered the words, they read contrary from that which you translated and caused to be written; and on this wise the Devil has sought to lay a cunning plan, that he may destroy this work.... "Behold, I say unto you, that you shall not translate again those words which have gone forth out of your hands And now, verily I say unto you, that an account of those [same] things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands, are engraver upon the plates of Nephi [another part of the Book of Mormon plates] Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi ... and thus I will confound those who have altered my words. I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil" (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 3). On the fifteenth day of April, eighteen hundred and twenty-nine, Oliver Cowdery came to

my house—until then I had never seen him. He stated to me that having been teaching school in the neighborhood where my father resided; and my father being one of those who sent to the school; he went to board for a season at my father's house, and while there the family related to him the circumstance of my having received the plates, and accordingly he had come to make inquiries of me. Two days after the arrival of Mr. Cowdery, (being the 17th of April), I commenced to translate the Book of Mormon, and he commenced to write for me. We still continued the work of translation, when in the ensuing month, (May, 1829) we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, as we found mentioned in the translation of the plates.

The Aaronic Priesthood Restored by John the Baptist

While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying unto us, "Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness. "

He said this Aaronic priesthood had not the power of laying on of hands, for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter; and he commanded us to go and be baptized, and gave us directions that I should baptize Oliver Cowdery, and afterwards that he should baptize me. John the Baptist Ordains Joseph and Oliver*
Accordingly we went and were baptized, I baptized him first, and



afterwards he baptized me; after which I laid my hands upon his head and ordained him to the Aaronic priesthood, and afterwards he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same priesthood, for so we were commanded.

The messenger who visited us on this occasion, and conferred this priesthood upon us, said that his name was John; the same that is called John the Baptist, in the New Testament; and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James, and John, who held the keys of the priesthood of Melchizedek; which priesthood he said should in due time be conferred on us—and that I should be called the first elder, and he the second. It was on the fifteenth day of May, eighteen hundred and twenty-nine, that we were baptized and ordained under the hand of the messenger.

Immediately upon our coming up out of the water, after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, as soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy; when standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of the Church, and many other things connected with the Church and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost and rejoiced in the God of our salvation. The Translation Continues at the Whitmer Farm Near Fayette, New York Shortly after commencing to translate, I became acquainted with Mr. Peter Whitmer of Fayette, Seneca County, New York, and also with some of his family. In the beginning of the month of June, his son David Whitmer came to the place where we were residing, and brought with him a two-horse wagon, for the purpose of having us accompany him to his father's place and there remain until we should finish the work. He proposed that we should have our board free of charge, and the assistance of one of his brothers to write for me, as also his own assistance when convenient. Having much need of such timely aid in an undertaking so arduous, and being informed that the people of the neighborhood were anxiously awaiting the opportunity to enquire into these things, we accepted the invitation,

and accompanied Mr. Whitmer to his father's house, and there resided until the translation was finished, and the copyright secured. Upon our arrival, we found Mr. Whitmer's family very anxious concerning the work, and very friendly towards ourselves. They continued so, boarded and lodged us according to proposal, and John Whitmer, in particular, assisted us very much in writing during the remainder of the work. We found the people of Seneca County in general friendly and disposed to enquire into the truth of these strange matters which now began to be

noised abroad: many opened their houses to us in order that we might have an opportunity of meeting with our friends for the purposes of instruction and explanation. We met with many from time to time who were willing to hear us, and wishful to find out the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and apparently willing to obey the gospel when once fairly convinced and satisfied in their own minds. In this same month of June, my brother Hyrum Smith, David Whitmer, and Peter Whitmer, Jr., were baptized in Seneca



Lake, the two former by myself, the latter by Oliver Cowdery. From this time forth many became believers, and were baptized, whilst we continued to instruct and persuade as many as applied for information.

The Witnesses See the Plates

In the course of the work of the translation, we ascertained that three special witnesses were to be provided by the Lord, to whom he would grant that they should see the plates from which this work (the Book of Mormon) should be translated, and that these witnesses should bear record of the same.

Almost immediately after we had made this discovery, it occurred to Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and the aforementioned Martin

Harris (who had come to inquire after our progress in the work) that they would have me inquire of the Lord, to know if they might not obtain of Him to be these three special witnesses. (Joseph Smith made enquiry and received approval of these men as the Three Witnesses.)

Not many days after...Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and myself agreed to retire into the woods, and try to obtain by fervent and humble prayer, the fulfillment of the promises given in the revelation; that they should have a view of the plates. We accordingly made choice of a piece of woods convenient to Mr. Whitmer's house, to which we retired, and having knelt down we began to pray in much faith to Almighty God to bestow upon us a realization of these promises. According to previous arrangements I commenced, by vocal prayer to our Heavenly Father, and was followed by each of the rest in succession. We did not yet, however, obtain any answer, or manifestation of the divine favor in our behalf. We again observed the same order of prayer each calling on and praying fervently to God in rotation; but with the same result as before. Upon this our second failure, Martin Harris proposed that he would withdraw himself from us, believing as he expressed himself that his presence was the cause of our not obtaining what we wished for; he accordingly withdrew from us, and we knelt down again, and had not been many minutes engaged in prayer when presently we beheld a light above us in the air of exceeding brightness, and behold an angel stood before us. In his hands he held the plates which we had been praying for these to have a view of: he turned over the leaves one by one, so that we could see them, and discover the engravings thereon distinctly. He addressed himself to David Whitmer, and said, "David, blessed is the Lord, and he that keeps His commandments." When immediately afterwards, we heard a voice from out of the bright light above us, saying, "These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God; the translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear."

I now left David and Oliver and went in pursuit of Martin Harris, who I found at a considerable distance, fervently engaged in prayer, he soon told me however that he had not yet prevailed with the Lord, and earnestly requested me to join him in prayer, that he also might realize the same blessings which we had just received. We accordingly joined in prayer, and ultimately obtained our desires, for before we had yet finished, the same vision was opened to our view; at least it was again to me, and I once more beheld and heard the same things; whilst at the same moment, Martin Harris cried out, apparently in ecstasy of joy, "Tis enough; mine eyes have beheld," and jumping up he shouted, "Hosannah!" blessing God, and otherwise rejoiced exceedingly. Having thus through the mercy of God obtained these manifestations, it now remained for these three individuals to fulfill the commandment which they had received; to bear record of these things...they drew up and subscribed the following document:

The Testimony of Three Witnesses

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken; and we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for His voice hath declared it unto us: wherefore we know of a surety, that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been strewn unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true; and it is marvelous in our eyes, nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we

know that if we are faithful in Christ we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment seat of Christ, and shall dwell with Him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen. OLIVER COWDERY, DAVID WHITMER, MARTIN HARRIS.

Soon after these things had transpired, the following additional testimony was obtained:

And Also the Testimony of Eight Witnesses

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that Joseph Smith, Jr., the translator of this work, has strewn unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated, we did handle with our hands: and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has strewn unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety, that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world to witness unto the world that which we have seen; and we lie not, God bearing witness of it. CHRISTIAN WHITMER, JACOB WHITMER, PETER WHITMER, JR., JOHN WHITMER, HIRAM PAGE, JOSEPH SMITH SEN., HYRUM SMITH, SAMUEL H. SMITH.

The Melchizedek Priesthood Restored

We now became anxious to have that promise realized to us, which the angel that conferred upon us the Aaronic priesthood had given us, viz.: that provided we continued faithful, we should also have the Melchizedek priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We had for some time made this matter a I subject of humble prayer, and at length we got together in the chamber of Mr. Whitmer's house in order more particularly to seek of the Lord what we now so earnestly desired: and here to our unspeakable satisfaction did we realize the truth of the Savior's promise: "Ask, and you shall receive, seek, and you

shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." For we had not long been engaged in solemn and fervent prayer, when the word of the Lord came unto us in the chamber, commanding us that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, and that he also should ordain me to the same office; and then to ordain others as it should be made known unto us, from time to time. We were, however, commanded to defer this our ordination until such times as it should be practicable to have our brethren, who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together, when we must have their sanction to our thus proceeding to ordain each other; and have them decide by vote whether they were willing to accept us as spiritual teachers, or not; when also we were commanded to bless bread and break it with them; and to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them; afterward proceed to ordain each other according to commandment, then call out such men as the Spirit should dictate, and ordain them; and then attend to the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, upon all those whom we had previously baptized; doing all things in the name of the Lord. In this manner did the Lord continue to give us instructions from time to time concerning the duties which now devolved upon us. Among many other things of the kind, we obtained of Him the following by the spirit of prophecy and revelation; which not only gave us much information, but also pointed out to us the precise day upon which, according to His will and commandment, we should proceed to organize His Church once again, here upon the earth: "The rise of the church of Christ in these last days, being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh, it being regularly organized and established agreeably to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April; which commandments were given to Joseph Smith, Jr., who was called of God and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the first elder of this church; and to Oliver Cowdery, who was also called of God an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the second elder of this church, and ordained under his hand; and this according to the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory both now and for ever. Amen. . . ." (Doctrine and Covenants 17: 1).

The Church Organized, April 6, 1830

Meantime, our translation drawing to a close, we went to Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, secured the copyright and agreed with Mr. Egbert Grandin to print five thousand copies for the sum of three thousand dollars. Whilst the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the printer, we still continued to bear testimony and give information as far as we had opportunity; and also made known to our brethren that we had received commandment to organize the Church, and accordingly we met together for that purpose, at the house of the above mentioned Mr. Whitmer (being six in number) on Tuesday the sixth day of April, A.D. one thousand eight hundred and thirty. Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to our heavenly Father, we proceeded (according to previous commandment) to call on our brethren to know whether they accepted us as their teachers in the things of the Kingdom of God, and whether they were satisfied that we should proceed and be organized as a Church according to said commandment which we had received. To these they consented by an unanimous vote. I then laid my hands upon Oliver Cowdery and ordained him an elder of the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," after which he ordained me also to the office of an elder of said Church. We then took bread, blessed it, and brake it with them, also wine, and blessed it, and drank it with them. We then laid our hands upon each individual member of the Church present that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and be confirmed members of the Church of Christ. The Holy Ghost was poured out upon us to a very great degree; some prophesied, whilst we all praised the Lord and rejoiced exceedingly. We now proceeded to call out and ordain some others of the brethren to different offices of the priesthood, according as the Spirit manifested unto us; and after a happy time spent in witnessing and



feeling for ourselves the powers and the blessings of the Holy Ghost, through the grace of God bestowed upon us, we dismissed with the pleasing knowledge that we were now individually members of, and acknowledged of God, "The Church of Jesus Christ," organized in accordance with commandments and revelations given by Him to ourselves in the last days, as well as according to the order of the Church as recorded in the New Testament.

"Behold I will reveal unto you the priesthood by the hand of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and day of the Lord. And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made [in the Scriptures] to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers [to Christ's true Gospel]; if it were not so [Zion would not be built and] the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming."

"And for this cause, that men might be made partakers of the glories which were to be revealed, the Lord sent forth the fullness of his gospel, his everlasting covenant, reasoning in plainness and simplicity, to prepare the weak for those things which are coming on the earth. . . ." (Doctrine and Covenants 108:1).